

CONFIDENTIALNAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

Op-16-B-5

18 May 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR FILEALL TIMES GCT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors SS JOHN ARMSTRONG, U.S. Liberty Ship, 7176 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, agents Grace Line, on Government Service.

1. The JOHN ARMSTRONG was struck by a mine at 1608 GCT, 21 April 1944, in 41.15 N-12.32 E, having sailed from Anzio 21 April with an escort for Naples, with a cargo of empty shell casings and drums; draft 25'3" aft, 9' forward. Vessel did not sink but proceeded under her own power to the Port of Naples.
2. Ship was on an unknown course, speed 7.5 knots, not zigzagging, degaussing on, radio silent, 9 lookouts on the bridge and all guns. The weather was clear, sea smooth, wind force 3, sun bearing 15°, visibility good about 9, a LST and a LCI were dead ahead to 5° to port.
3. At 1608 an explosion occurred underneath the ship forward. Hull buckled at bow, stem twisted, deck plates buckled from the aft part of #1 hatch to foremast, #1 booms buckled and bent, deck plates cracked in fore and aft part of hatch coaming, bulkhead abreast aft end #2 hatch cracked, sides buckled as far as underwater line, aft part #3 hatch deck bulged and cracked in several places, steamline to deck winches broken in several places, main deck fore part #4 hatch cracked, aft end #4 hatch starboard side deck bulged in several places, boat davits of #2 boat bent. There was no fire. Underwater damage not ascertained. No. 2 hold starboard and port flooded slowly but were kept under control by ship's pumps. Ship proceeded on course 215°, speed 10 knots and arrived at Naples, draft 23'1" aft, 13'9" forward. Preliminary investigation indicates ship struck a mine at the keel as ship was raised upward a few feet after the explosion and no perceptible list to port or starboard observed. No distress signal sent, no counter offensive possible. Confidential codes were secured on board.
4. Ship was not abandoned, but 143 of U.S.A. Port Battalion were transferred to a British corvette which put back to Anzio. Total complement on board was 222, including 152 U.S.A. Port Battalion, 28 Armed Guard, and 42 merchant crew; one Armed Guard dead, 221 survived including 3 Armed Guard and 9 Army injured.
5. The mine was not sighted.
6. After the explosion escort instructed master to remain 6 cable lengths astern. Escort did not signal to slow down when nearing port, but entered breakwater and left ship on its own in the darkness. Master stopped ship and found that had he followed escort on basis of last signal he would have hit breakwater. Could not anchor as he was unsure whether windlass would stand strain, or if he could haul in the chain after anchoring. Master stated escort should not have left ship without signing off and obtaining an acknowledgment.

BARBARA CONARD,
Lt. (jg), W-V(S), USNR.

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